

Wives as deputy husbands



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“ Wives as Deputy Husbands” by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich Article Review “

Wives as Deputy Husbands” by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich was written to give the author’s opinion on the roles of women in the 17th and 18th century. Some historians thought women were merely there to do housework and take care of the children. They thought they were helpless. On the contrary other’s thought they were very involved in various affairs such as: blacksmiths, silversmiths, tinworkers, shoeworkers, tanners, etc. They thought they may have been very independent.

However, this article is used to understand how households were run and how women fit into both female and male roles. The author’s thesis of this article is to inform the reader that women had more roles in colonial times than people rarely consider. Ulrich’s contention is that “ the husband was in control of the external affairs and of the family, a husband’s decision would incorporate his wife’s opinion, and should fate or circumstance prevent the husband from fulfilling his role the wife could stand in his place” (Paragraph 4.).

Women didn’t only depend on their husband. She was not helpless. Her commitment to her husband did allow him to be able to trust her with difficult tasks that a servant couldn’t be trusted with. A wife specialized in housekeeping skills but it also included the responsibilities of being a deputy husband. Ulrich says “ Economic opportunities were limited for women; however, femaleresponsibilitywas a very broad topic” (Paragraph 8.). A woman could do any task as long as it furthered the good of her family and her husband deemed it acceptable.

Wives could double as their husbands and became respected companions and shared the spouse's authority. There was no sharp division between home and work in the colonial time period. Many people worked on a farm which also doubled as their home. This was also true for male and females, their spaces overlapped. While the husband was around her responsibility was limited. When he was absent her responsibility was more weighted. If a woman became a widow, and she had no sons, and chose not to remarry she could inherit the deceased spouse's estate.

Many of the male's responsibilities were less desirable to a woman than doing housework was. This work may prepare her to function competently in a male's world, though. This article is specific to female roles. The textbook and class discussions/lectures mainly taught about the people of colonial America as a whole. We learned a lot more about men's roles and female responsibility wasn't mentioned very often. The article taught me that women were very important to not only the household but the entire family.

In her husband's absence she would take on his responsibilities as well as the household one's and not only be able to survive but thrive. I think it was important to read this article because both women and men were present in this time period. Without women there would be no men (literally), so why would we study the important of one? To understand the time period I think all genders and races need to be studied to a certain extent. The strengths of this article were that Ulrich added many examples to help understand how not all women were shrew and servile but rather very independent.

A weakness was that she also presented arguments from the opposing sides which in some cases were slightly confusing. Yes, it does fit into the

prevailing interpretation because men weren't present in every situation and when they weren't women were to maintain the household and affairs. This information is indeed different than what I previously learned about gender roles; women stayed at home to cook, clean, and take care of children while men worked. Overall, this article was very informative and helped me understand how families worked together to be successful in the colonial time period.